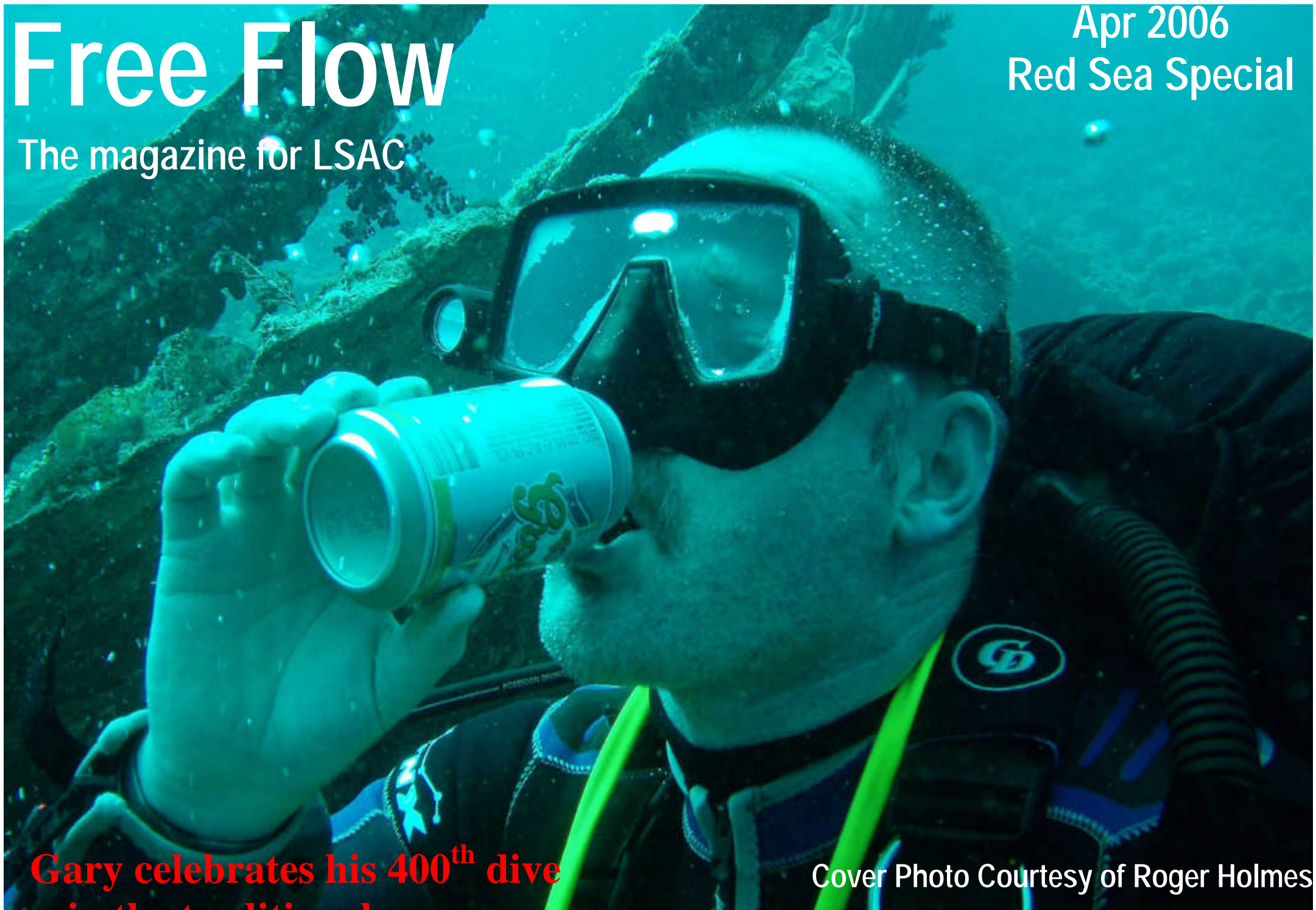


Free Flow

The magazine for LSAC

Apr 2006
Red Sea Special



Gary celebrates his 400th dive
in the Red Sea

Cover Photo Courtesy of Roger Holmes



Welcome to the Red Sea Special, an edition for those who went to gloat and reminisce and those that didn't to be envious.



If you look at the picture long enough through the clouds you will see lobsters cooking slowly on the patio.

If you would like to become Miss or Mr May or know someone who should be, then please email me with the photo and a brief description of why the person should be a page 3 lovely. **pete.barnard@power.alstom.com**

Report: Red Sea 2006

By Nat Twigg

I confess I started to wonder what I'd got myself into a few days before we were due to fly out to the Red Sea. I needn't have worried. This was one of the best holidays of my life. So, I should start by thanking Kev, aka the Silver Fox, for all his hard work in organising the trip. I should also thank everyone who was on the trip for making what could have been merely a great week, fantastic.

After an extraordinary detour via Hurghada (blame the Red Arrows), we finally touched down in Sharm, greeted by a welcoming blanket of hot African air. Having spent the entire flight listening to the irritating yacking of a four-strong team of vacuous Chelsea tractor drivers, this was a relief. I'd learnt enough about Moschino's new line, Paris Hilton's new hairdo, and the pros and cons of Botox, darling. Bring on the diving.



A short transfer later we were installed on Typhoon, an impressive boat with a big personality of its own. Superfluous boots banished to a locker for the week. Bliss! We spent the remainder of the evening being briefed on the week ahead and setting up our tanks ready for a 6 a.m. start.

I woke early next morning to the low grumble of Typhoon's engines powering us towards our first site. The gentle creaking of the boat's wooden interior redolent of a bygone era.

The inaugural dive was to be the Dunraven. This wreck was discovered in 1977 to the north of Beacon Rock in the choppy waters of the Strait of Goba. The boat was constructed in 1873 and sunk after a collision with the Sha'ab Mahmud Reef in 1876. To be honest, I don't remember much of this dive, and failed to log anything that would remind me. The days do tend to blur together! What I do remember is the crystal clear waters, the abundance of fish and the immediate sense of freedom, having left the dry suit back in the UK.

The second dive (by which point I'd started to concentrate) was the Carnatic (known locally as 'The Bottle Wreck'), nestled amongst Chrisoula K and Seastar to the north side of the Sha'ab Abu Nuhas reef on the edge of the Strait of Goba. It is Incredible to think that this boat, still largely intact, predates the opening of the Suez Canal. In contrast to the other reef casualties of this region, Carnatic has over one hundred years of coral growth, providing for both wreck and reef lovers. She was a British mixed steam-sail vessel launched in 1862.

We learnt from Tori and Barry, our on-board hosts, that her ephemeral life ended on the 14th September 1869 after having struck the reef. Captain, crew and passengers remained on board, routines were maintained, meals served at the usual time, as they waited for Sumatra, Carnatic's sister ship, to rescue them. The damage was considered to be minimal and whilst the revelry continued on-board, water began to infiltrate the engine room. Whether the decision was based upon reticence, ignorance or arrogance, ultimately it proved fatal as the ship, overcome with water, finally sank, needlessly taking with it twenty-seven lives.

History over, the Carnatic's interior is a sight to drink in - densely populated, predominantly with Glass fish. If you stay very still they dance around you, right before your goggles. I was amazed at the way the shoals move as one, in perfect unison, light glancing from their little bodies in bursts. I think that the best way to describe the effect is aquatic fireworks. The image is indelibly etched on the back of my eyes, it was a truly magical sight.

The next two treasures were the Marcus and the Ullyses. The Ullyses is a beautiful dive, perhaps one of my favourites from this trip. There is a profusion of Lion fish (Turkey fish) at this site as well as an abundance of the magical Glass fish. It's a sore point though, as I watched my camera float to the surface on this dive and drift away on the current. This was followed by perhaps the most frustrating safety stop ever!

Having recovered from the camera loss, the next dive was the Rosalie Moller. She sank two days after the famous Thistlegorm, attacked by the same barrage of German fire. She sits upright in fairly deep water, this means that as a Sports Diver only the deck is available for exploration, the bulk of the ship sits below 35 metres. Still, there is a profusion of fish life and the part of the boat available for inspection tells its own story.



We paid three visits to the Barge, two as a consequence of rough seas and inability to move from our mooring. In terms of fish diversity, it is an incredible dive, particularly by night. We all became very well acquainted with Jeremy, the Barge's resident Moray Eel. Although a little cantankerous (and who can blame him, he must be the most photographed eel in the world), he'll show you his fine set of dentures if you get too close, he is an amazing sight - all two metres of him (estimation, but I have a habit of exaggerating).



The very gorgeous Jeremy

Jeremy's friends include Crocodile fish, Bird Wrasse, Hump Head Wrasse, Squirrel, Lion/Turkey, Angel and Clown fish. The Barge is literally crawling with life.

After a couple of stabs at the Barge, unable to move on to a new site we chose a reef dive as opposed to a further dive on the Barge, this was a very good decision! Despite the site being an unknown entity to our guides, serendipity was at play.

Within five minutes we had stumbled across a turtle. Transfixed by its regal swimming, more like flying,

I nearly missed the fly by of five dolphins (it could have been four, but who's counting?). I felt as high as a kite.



After this great adventure we then returned for a night dive on the Barge. In complete contrast the next dive was to be the Giannis D.

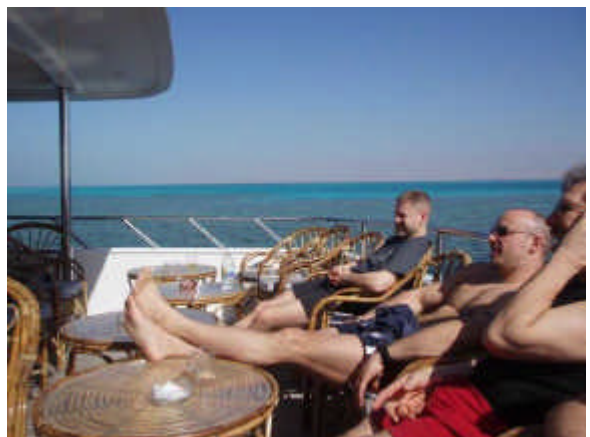
Books describe the 'dive difficulty' of Giannis D as 'easy'. However, even with the experience of our Egyptian guide, Yasser, the interior is foreboding to say the least. She is another casualty of the great Sha'ab Abu Nuhas reef. A relatively new victim, sinking in 1983.

The ship was a 2,900 tonne freighter, of Japanese origin. Originally called 'Shoyo Maru', later, presumably under Greek ownership, 'Marcos' and at the time of the sinking, 'Giannis D', the D designating the shipping line 'Danae'. A large 'D' is still visible on the funnel over the front of the quarter deck.

Eventually split in two by the trauma of the reef impact, Giannis lies at a really peculiar angle. At the briefing before the dive we were warned that the spurious angles within the interior of the ship could play with the mind. Despite this I caught myself trying to align myself to the walls, floors and ceilings, wondering why I felt so lopsided.

The engine room is heaven for some, hell for others. I fall in the latter bracket. With a few divers inside, limited experience of diving within enclosed spaces, minimal natural light and only one exit I found my air going down rapidly. As with all steps in diving, I'm hoping that experience will make this type of environment easier.

Towards the end of the week, and don't think it was all diving! – plenty of time for alcohol consumption and banter (although I learnt it was better to give Egyptian white wine a very wide berth, not personally having a taste for TCP), we were given the opportunity to dive the famous Thistlegorm.



Her history is well documented. Her wreck was discovered by Cousteau in 1956. She was constructed in 1940 and was en route (her fourth and final voyage) from Glasgow with supplies for the British Eighth Army, engaged in Operation Crusade (WWII), when a number of bombs were released by a squadron of German Heinkels. The damage was colossal and remains clearly evident today, the boat appears to have been sliced into two. Her rapid sinking is said to be attributable to the weight of the cargo on board and the cargo is astounding.



BSA bike with Squirrel Fish

Squirrel fish nonchalantly weave in and out of tanks, cars, rifles and numerous BSA motorbikes,

stacked side by side. The actual packing of the ship must have proved a logistical nightmare.

The wreck appears to have been frozen in time and I think it is this which makes it such a haunting dive.

Our final dive of the week was the Shark and Yolanda Reefs, separated by a lagoon. This is also a wreck dive, in a sense, although most of the wreckage is gone, leaving behind a cargo of toilets! The dive is located right on the tip of the Sinai Peninsula and is normally classified as a drift dive. However, we found ourselves working against a fairly tame current, which I understand is a rare occurrence. Certainly, the whirling waters above, suggested drift below and so it was with some trepidation that I entered the water.



Blue Spotted Lagoon Ray

The opportunity of an up close examination of two Blue-spotted Lagoon Ray brought perfection to the diving week.

As we got ourselves ready to disembark Typhoon, Tori and Barry asked if I wanted to stay another week, there was a space available. It was tempting and had I known how long it takes to get your land legs back, I might have agreed (but redundancy payments only go so far). The final night brought us, and our wobbly legs, to Sharm El Sheikh. Food, more TCP! and group bonding (all in our Egyptian head gear) around the Hubbly Bubbly pipe. A great evening.



The next day saw us quad biking across the Egyptian desert. The Egyptians seemed nervous around a 16-strong throng of largely 'hairy arsed' divers (I don't include myself, although I was quite flattered to be counted as an honorary member of the 'hairy arsed' brigade). We were instructed to drive in a convoy but when the person in front of you is pottering along you can't control the urge to not "Stay in line!", it was great getting told off at 31. Unfortunately, my recklessness took out Pete H's quad but I don't think the Egyptians spotted the bits left hanging off. Phew.

All in all, it was a great week. Did I mention that? I would recommend it to anyone who has yet to go. So, see the Silver Fox (the only man who can laugh under water) and sign up now!







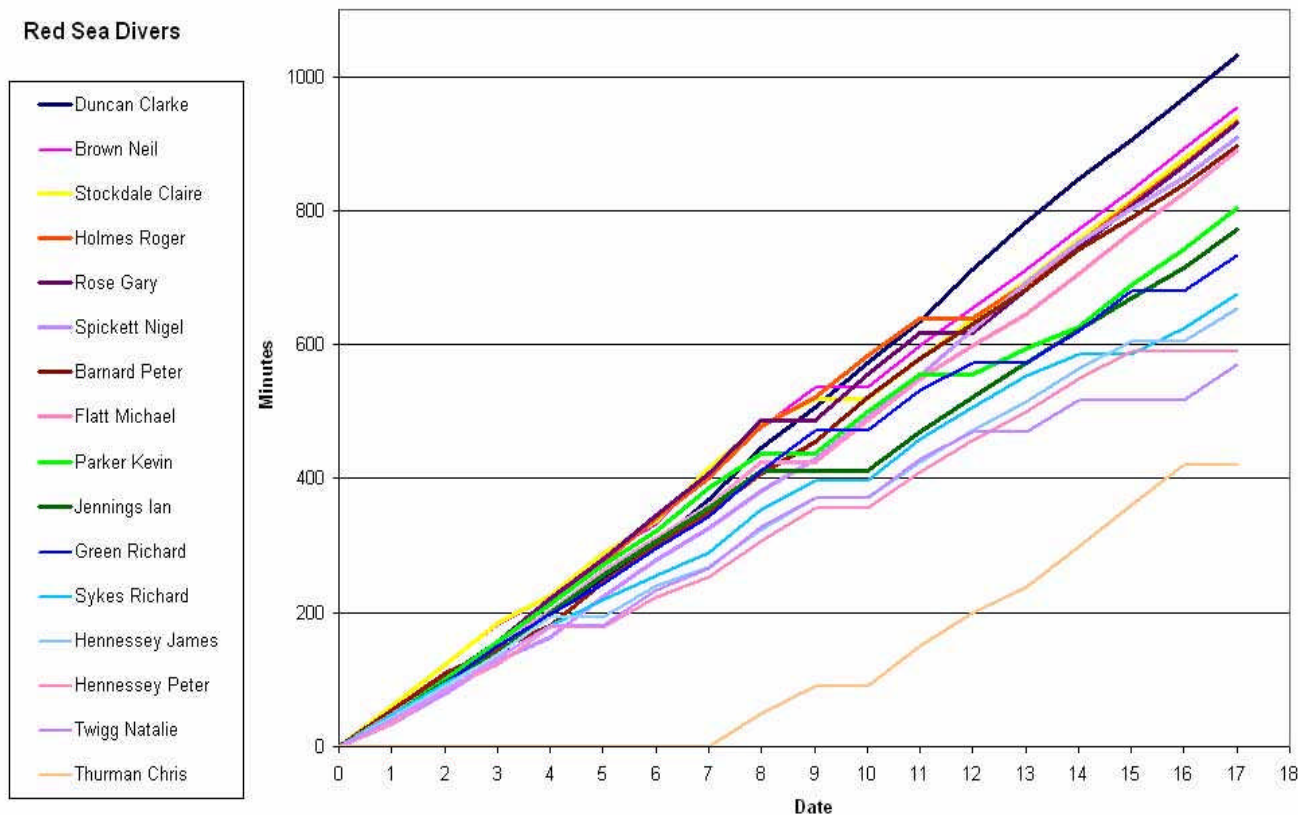
Red Sea Trip 2006 - Statistics

Yes, I can work out the statistics on a simple trip, and for the Red Sea special here they are:

Leading Positions

For maximum time in the water the honors must go to Clarke Duncan with an amazing 1031 minutes (i.e. over 17 hours). Clarke dived all the 17 dives that were available.

The positions of all are as shown on the graph below



There are of course other statistics that might be of interest:

Deepest Dive: Claire Stockdale
41.5m on the Rosalie Muller

Longest Dive: Claire Stockdale 81
minutes on the Rosalie Muller

Highest Average Dive Length:
Gary Rose averaging 62 minutes per
dive (over 15 dives)

The Depth Distribution chart below shows that most dives were in the 25-30 m region, the high reading for the 10-15m was due to the number of dives on 'the barge' when we were hiding from the weather

